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ABSTRACT

This paper conceives of a model of democracy that is tied up with narrative practices, and demonstrates how the initially democratic and radical auspices of one scholar's critique developed into a form of theory that was profoundly undemocratic in its narrative. The paper notes that the contemporary debate about power derives from a series of debates that occurred in the context of different models of democracy in the early 1960s, and that the most theoretically incisive contribution was S. Lukes' innovation of a "radical view" of power. However, the paper notes that the implications of this intervention, and the subsequent development of the debate have not been canvassed in their implications for the models of democracy. The paper also considers the implications of post-Foucauldian moves in the political language game that radical theory has developed. Contains 50 references and 6 notes. (RS)

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Power, Narrative And Democracy In Social Theory

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Abstract

The contemporary debate about power derives from a series of debates that occurred in the context of different models of democracy in the early 1960s, notably those initiated by Dahl and Bachrach and Baratz. The most theoretically incisive contribution was Lukes' innovation of a 'radical view' of power. However, the implications of this intervention, and the subsequent development of the debate, particularly in the response of other radical theorists, such as Geras, to its post-Foucauldian turn, have not been canvassed in their implications for models of democracy. This paper will conceive of a model of democracy that is tied up with narrative practices, and demonstrate how the initially democratic and radical auspices of the critique of Dahl developed into a form of theory that was profoundly undemocratic in its narrative. It will then consider the implications of post-Foucauldians moves in the political language game that radical theory has developed.

We are blind and live our blind lives out in blindness. Poets are damned but they are not blind, they see with the eyes of the angels

William Carlos Williams
Introduction to Howl for Carl Solomon
1956

Equivocar el camino
es llegar a la nieve
y llegar a la nieve
es pacer durante veinte siglos las hierbas de los cemmenterios

Federico García Lorca[1]
Pequeño poema infinito
1929-1930

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[1] The excerpt is from Lorca's 'Little infinite poem', which, in translation reads:

'To mistake the path is to reach the snow, and to reach the snow is to graze for twenty centuries on the grass of cemetries'.

Concepts of power and the dissolution of political boundaries

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Introduction

The task: to chart a simple course through some difficult terrain. The objective: to go boldly; to resist, hopefully to eschew, well trodden paths metaphorically pointing in the past to the sterility of snow, to the grass of cemeteries.

One difficulty lies in the footing. Underfoot is littered the detritus of ages. The ground is deceptive, slippery. Whatever the approach adopted, it must be trod with care.

Not only the space underfoot is risky. All approaches present hazard. Each invites choice. Options must be exercized. None is necessarily safe. Different vantage points present themselves. Some have a propensity to radical views; some an appreciation of what can't be seen, except, perhaps, by angels or poets. Others offer more pedestrian access in pursuit of power.

Machiavelli and Hobbes first cleared the space. Like many pioneers, they left their mark. They disciplined the boundaries of the space, irrevocably. One finds it as difficult to resist the paths they cleared as have most of those who have trekked over and cultivated this landscape. Later cultivation has shaped the contours of the terrain. Some of it under the guise of reseeding the old crop. Gramsci's (1971) 'Modern Prince' is a case in point. It will be today's point of departure.

The terrain

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[2] Comments welcomed: thanks to Winton Higgins and Ross Poole for their comments on a very different first draft. They may not like the slide into what they might construe as 'forthright Nietschean nihilism' of this draft (as did not a very different audience, the gentlemen of the St. Andrews University Laurentian Dining Club) when they were subjected, with some surprise and consternation, to a much early version of it. I hope, however, for a more constructive response on this occasion.

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Modern debates around the concept of power, their relation to notions of hegemony, ideology, and the concept of democracy constitute the terrain. These debates tie irrevocably to notions constitutive of the political sphere. Central to the terrain was a concern for the degree of occlusion of interests that various categories of people might enjoy, and the degree to which the transparency of sovereign consumers rendered occlusion impossible. In the terms of modern politics, an era now passing, the context of the cold war rivalry between the ideologies of Marxism and liberalism framed the outer limits of debate. The symbolic toppling of the Berlin Wall settled one aspect of that debate in 1989, reshaping the terrain profoundly.

The end of a theoretical era, the modern era, passed with the death-knell of the key elements in the Marxian narrative contribution to the debate around power. Previously, a set of debates revolving around the ways in which power masked or represented democracy characterized the modern era. These intersect with different conceptions of citizenship. The conclusion drawn is that the passing of the modern era of power, theoretically, dissolves the conceptual boundaries of previously existing notions of citizenship. As ever, in social theory, the flickering representation of empirical images lags their projection. First, a memory, and a memoir, from times past.

Howl, Post-Marxism? Snapshots from an era.

'I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed . . . .' The incantation begins. It's familiarity comforts. It was Carl Solomon whose incarceration chilled and excited Ginsberg's (1956) poetic imagination. For all its obscenity, its rhythm of events is a celebration of achievement. Another era, another poetic snapshot, this one seemingly more modest, more measured. 'Times change and people change. Their ideas change; develop, progress - and regress' (Geras 1987). From regression to renunciation the slope is slippery, the descent steep, the calumny sudden. The litany of renunciation is familiar, the cast predictable, Bernstein the model Judas. 'I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed . . . '

> These remarks bear directly upon today. In the advanced capitalist world from the mid-1960s a generation of intellectuals was radicalized and won for Marxism. Many of them were disappointed in the hopes they formed - some of these wild but let that pass - and for a good while now we have been witnessing a procession of erstwhile Marxists, a sizeable proportion of the generational current they shared in creating, in the business of finding their way 'out' and away. This exit is always presented, naturally, in the guise of as intellectual advance. Those of us unpersuaded of it cannot

> but remind its proponents of what they once knew but seem instantly to forget as they make their exit, namely, that the evolution of ideas has a social and material context. We cannot help wondering how far their recent trajectory may have been influenced by a range of factors which they themselves would doubtless prefer to overlook: the pressures upon them of age and professional status, the pressure of the political time and environment we have been passing through, not very congenial, in the west at least, to the sustenance of revolutionary ideas; and then the lure of intellectual fashion, a consideration not to be underrated by any means.
>
> The life of the intellectual left is pulled by different forces. There is, on the one hand, a moral commitment of some sort, however formulated, to socialism, the end of exploitation, human liberation, a decent existence at last for everyone. But there is also, on the other hand, a certain self-image, *as* intellectual, and amongst its constituents, the desire for recognition, and so, perhaps, originality, and the hope or the sense of being in the very van, not just abreast of the latest theoretical development but one of its actual partisans and sponsors. The force of the former, the gravitational pull of moral commitment, is a variable one, as this same intellectual is well enough aware while he or she understands Marx. It is stronger when materially manifested, so to speak, visibly represented in and supported by a social movement - that of the exploited and the otherwise oppressed - particularly on the march, in an active struggle. It is much weaker where this is absent; or in defeat or retreat. The bare commitment, and the ultimate historical objectives can come here to seem rather abstract and remote, so distant from a particular personal destiny as to be hardly related to it at all (Geras 1987: 41).

It continues in this vein for another page or so. Despite any disclaimers to the contrary that were later to appear (Geras 1988: 45) the sense of betrayal is palpable. Under attack, and being defended are boundaries of ontology, epistemology and morality focused on theorizing power as hegemony that Geras would discipline through canonical tutelage and Laclau and Mouffe would deconstruct, put asunder and place aside. Let us, timorously, even with timidity, venture into these dangerous currents, taking our bearing in this enterprise from the central and, as Poulantzas (1969) once remarked, 'problematic' concept of power and its relation to the state.

Power

Once upon a time the relation between power and the state was quite clear. The state was either a thing captive to different interests or an immovable structure whose functions in the overall formation of society made its capture, without a total structural change, a remote possibility indeed. Increasingly, prospects of total structural change became displaced forever beyond the bounds of possibility. Neither state managers nor international investors responded favourably to radical change of the state form.

Control of the resources of the state premised power. The state apparatus, in less fatalistic scenarios, became subject to control. (In more fatalistic

scenarios fetishistic powers of control became vested in it.) For an interest group or a class interest to gain power some other group had to either lose power or have power wrested from them. If one interest held power another interest could only hold that power at the expense of that interest's holding. Power, conceived as somewhat like a see-saw, in classic zero-sum terms, was divisible. The more one party to a relation has the less another party can have. In the more structuralist versions, the state itself had an irreducible element of power and determinacy.

Early modern debates, the victorious modernist project the ground of which Hobbes sketched, play a significant role in this debate. A narrative sweep orchestrated from that mythical, heroic, modernist law-bringer, central to Hobbes' (1962) *Leviathan*, took centre stage. The conception of the monarch as a source of sovereign power found its terminus in the radical perspective for which Lukes (1974) sketches the framework. During this process the conceptual powers once attributed to the sovereign became rationalised and incorporated into other bodies, most notably in Marxist theory, into the ruling class and the state. Initially conceived in terms of its origin in the state or in the organs of the ruling class, such as the media, power now extends even into the other's thoughts and consciousness (Connell 1976). One cannot imagine a more sovereign power than that encapsulated in this indebtedness to a Marxian problematic of false consciousness. Where the state enjoys a central conceptual role, a similar project of capture conceptualises state intervention effects in terms of a long run in which reforms invariably erode the potential for autonomous action by the working class. The creation of inauthentic consciousness becomes the precursor and causal explanation of compliant action where the theory would have preferred revolutionary bodies.

Projects more aligned to an alternate discourse on power and the state, one more influenced by Machiavelli and mediated by Gramsci, tend to undercut any sense of a total score, composed and orchestrated by a sovereign subject, whether the state or a ruling class, in favour of more interpretative, contingent and local interpretation. It is in this sense that writers concerned with the 'post-modern' world of flux and discontinuity seem more closely aligned with the early modern world of Machiavelli's Florentian city-state. Consequently, if one were to seek a more fruitful starting point for a new theoretical strategy, then this more improvised and atonal scoring of the themes of everyday life, might offer one. It shares an

analytical focus on and fascination for shifting, unstable alliances, a concern for military strategy and a disinclination to believe in any single, originating and decisive centre of power. Hence there is some distance from these perspectives to the mythical world of order represented so positively and decisively by Hobbes.

Hobbes' representations have left their mark on modern theory in their insistence on the causal, atomistic and mechanistic nature of the relations of power, as well as the implicit concern with the essential centre of power. Sometimes these traces may be found where one might least expect them. Both Hobbes and Marx represent archetypal modernist thinkers, committed to notions of the necessity of order. Marx, of course, differed in his conception of the likelihood of it ever being achieved under capitalism, given the tendencies to disorder in its circuits of production.

That capitalism has not self-destructed, despite widespread punctuation by recession, inflation and unemployment, for many Marxian and socialist thinkers is a severe embarrassment. Not least, the embarrassment has been to the robustness of the Marxist theory of capitalist crisis. The theory predicts crisis but crisis has not transpired and now seems unlikely to, as socialism, the only system that ever posed any comparative threat, recedes into dismal legend. Many recent Marxists explained the persistence of capitalism and the absence of crisis in terms of the ruling hegemony which capitalist social and state relations have ensured. Sometimes, as in O'Connor (1973) or Habermas (1976), crisis theory became a floating signifier as the critical location shifted. While the state proved a relatively successful sovereign economic power the crisis shifted from the economy either to the budgetary politics of the state, in a 'fiscal crisis' (O'Connor 1973) or to the societal sphere, in a 'motivational' and 'legitimation crisis' (Habermas 1976). Of late these accounts have lost considerable intellectual credence, not in view of the powers of crisis resolution that the core capitalist countries have displayed but because of the continuation of economic crisis without major legitimation crises. In addition, the evident crisis of the east European state socialist societies has served to undercut political alternatives to the market as a source of legitimation.

Foucault's critique of ideology

The concept of hegemony seemed once to be the touchstone for explaining why Marxian prognostications had failed to materialize in capitalist

societies. Rapidly, the concept came under attack. Some criticisms concerned the empirical problems involved (Abercrombie et al 1980; Chamberlain 1982). Other attacks came from the 'postmodern' world of 'post-Marxism' and 'post-structuralism', the space that Foucault helped to create, a space that left little space for belief in a rational, guiding architectonic of action. The critique began in Paris with the 'nouvelle philosophes' in the wake of 1968, but has spun out remorselessly to incorporate many distinct areas of enquiry. The implications of the critique thus unleashed are considerable. The world of power known in the Hobbesian tradition, revolving around a sovereign subject, a guiding architectonic of causally effected action, suffered neglect. Neglect hastened mortality. The death of the sovereign subject killed originating sources of action. None were to inhabit the post-structural world. In there place are an endless series of contingencies. Although most evident in the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), some critics such as Perry Anderson (1983) have seen these tendencies as already implicit in Foucault (for example Foucault 1980).

Foucault regards ideology as a term of 'falsehood' whose relational opposition to a 'true' concept of 'science' can never be too far away. It is because his interest is less in issues of the truth and falsity of discourse and rather more in their functioning, that he seeks to avoid the term 'ideology'. A concept of disciplinary power has the purpose of avoiding ideology as a category of analysis. It seeks to demonstrate how the 'truths' and 'falsehoods' of particular discourses have been constituted historically. Thus, a concept of the state, as a unitary object of reflection, is not so much wrong, but simply mis-specified in recent debates. The conditions for the existence of such a state no longer exist, historically superseded. Power no longer concentrates simply in a sovereign centre and transmits mechanistically. Disciplinary power works exactly through the construction of routines.

A past characteristic of the discourse of power and the state was the super-agency attributed to one overarching A imposing its will on the agencies of the many Bs. Analysis saw concepts of the ruling class, state, culture etc., occlude the consciousness of subjects, creating false consciousness, so that language masked real interests. It was always clear what the practical implications of these analyses were. Good theory would replace bad theory.

Good theory would enable the realisation of real interests that that theory and practice created and re-created, rather than occluded.

After Foucault and the development of what has become known as 'post-structuralism', power no longer works conceptually by random mechanical intervention. Other terms also decay with the irruption of discourse analysis. Laclau and Mouffe (1987: 97) suggest that the decay is not accidental.

> The centrality we give to the category of 'discourse' derives from our attempt to emphasize the purely historical and contingent character of the being of objects. This is not a fortuitous discovery which could have been made at any point in time; it is rather, deeply rooted in the history of modern capitalism. In societies which have a low technological level of development, where the reproduction of material life is carried out by means of fundamentally repetitive practices, the 'language games' or discursive sequences which organize social life are predominantly stable. This situation gives rise to the illusion that the being of objects, which is a purely social construction, belongs to things themselves. The idea of a world organized through a stable ensemble of essential forms, is the central presupposition in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. The basic illusion of metaphysical thought resides precisely in this unawareness of the historicity of being. It is only in the contemporary world, when technological change and the dislocating rhythm of capitalist transformation constantly alter the discursive sequences which construct the reality of objects, that the merely historical character of being becomes fully visible. In this sense, contemporary thought as a whole is, to a large extent, an attempt to cope with this increasing realization, and the consequent moving away from essentialism. In Anglo-American thought we could refer to the pragmatist turn and the anti-essentialist critique of post-analytic philosophy, starting from the work of the later Wittgenstein; in continental philosophy, to Heidegger's radicalization of phenomenology and to the critique of the theory of the sign in post-structuralism. The crisis of normative epistemologies, and the growing awareness of the non-algorithmic character of the transition from one scientific paradigm to another, point in the same direction.

At the core of both recent poststructuralist debates and the classical conception of the relation between consciousness and interests is some conception of a significant relation between power and language. In classical socialism, the relation was always one of masking, of appearances, of falsehood - one in which language distorted or misrepresented what reality should really be taken to be. Hence, the centrality of vocabularies of 'false-consciousness'. The relationship of language to consciousness is not one of falsehood in post-structuralism. No assumption of reality can exist as anything more fundamental than its representation in language, the horizon of its being; hence language cannot mask anything. All it can do is represent possibilities, position possibilities in relation to each other.

Language is the central focus of all post-structuralism. In the broadest terms, language defines the possibilities of meaningful existence at the same time as it limits them. Language constitutes our sense of ourselves as a distinct subjectivity. Subjectivity, constituted through a myriad of what post-structuralism terms 'discursive practices', works through practices of talk, text, writing, cognition, argumentation, representation generally. The meanings of and membership within the categories of discursive practice will be a constant site of struggle over power. Different identities posit, resist and fight over both the possibilities for self, and others, attachments to the subjectivity that constructs different conceptions of individuality. Nature does not fix identity; forging individuality is the expression of an active process. Post-structuralism admits of no rational, unified human being, or class or gendered subject that is the loci or source of the expression of identity. Membership in a category as a particular type of subject becomes regarded as the effect of devices of categorisation; thus identity is contingent, provisional, achieved rather than given. Identity is always in process, as always subject to reproduction or transformation through discursive practices that secure or refuse particular posited identities. Identities are not absolute but are always relational. One construes something in relation to some other thing. Difference defines identity, rather than it being something intrinsic to a particular person or category of experience, such as worker, wife, woman or whore. Each of these are possible signifiers of self, carrying complex, shifting and frequently ambiguous and contradictory meaning All discursive practices have historical specificity, particularly as the work of Foucault (1977) interpreted them.

The end of Marxism; the triumph of travesty, the regime of inversion?

Gramscian themes sometimes lead to a problematic of reproduction: of how ruling class culture reproduced itself as a bad thing in the minds of essentially good people and how the inertia of structural ways of doing and thinking things contributed to this reproduction (Connell 1976). Arguments, concepts, ways of thought reproduce existing forms of domination[3], according to these arguments. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) reverse this dominant interpretation of Gramscian themes and, in so doing, stand as at once probably the most reviled (see Geras 1987; 1988) and,

3 The fascinating and detailed history of this reception is provided by Forgacs (1989) in his review of 'Gramsci and Marxism in Britain'.

one would venture, the most sophisticated improvisation on the theme of hegemony that followed the publication of Gramsci's (1971) work.

Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) innovation was to transform the terms of debate. While hitherto the focus had been on the content of ideas as a characteristic of hegemony, henceforward they wished it to be on the form. Hegemony occurred wherever there was discursive fixity, clarity in assembly and ascription, signifiers pinned down and fixed rather than floating, fixing the form of debate, irrespective of the content. Behind this small innovation were some big implications.

Contemporary views of meaning see it as existing in the difference between relational terms which current representations defer to. However, representations do not always remain contextually and historically stable. Over time, there is every reason to think that they will shift. Attempts to fix or uncouple and change particular representational relations of meaning implicate power. Foucault (1977) sketches some of the historical subjectivities constituted through practices of power and knowledge. Knowledge used to structure and fix representations in historical forms is thus the accomplishment of power. In constructing this knowledge/power relation as the object of analysis one might seem to be celebrating a relativism in which any fixed point dissolves, as some of Foucault's critics, such as Perry Anderson (1983), insist.

Anderson's (1983) anxieties were entirely explicable. The older concept of hegemony saved the day for a theory that had as its principal agent an active and revolutionary class subject, by pointing to the conditions hampering the expression of that subjectivity. The newer conception of hegemony proved fatal for the theory that the older concept had saved. It sundered the connection between the notion of an economic base and superstructure, where one deduces political interests from underlying economic class interests. Phenomenal artefacts, even where conceptually posited as such, do not fix their representation: no 'authentic' class interests exist; the interests that subjects claim to have are merely signifiers of meaning that float in no necessary or correct way. These are the implications of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985; 1987) interventions that I wish to attach significance to on this occasion.

Geras (1987: 50) insists that Laclau and Mouffe (1985) 'lack proportion' in their critique of 'objective interests'. Objective interests require not an absolutely united class, fused in transparency to itself, to be possible. In such circumstances,

> we must believe not only that the working class can become 'absolutely united', not only, even, that it will then be 'transparent to itself'; we must believe this, in addition, under the description, 'the moment of proletarian chilliasm'. On such conditions we may employ the concept of objective interests, and otherwise not. But, of course, what we may actually believe in is the possibility of relative, and not absolute, unity: that a *large majority* of the working class could become *sufficiently* united. We may think that it could become, not 'transparent to itself' but more clear about what is wrong with the bourgeois social order, and persuaded of there being a realistic alternative to it. We may consider that the revolutionary transformation of that social order, painfully difficult of achievement, would be, not a religious consummation or advent, just the condition for a marked improvement in millions of people's lives. And on the strength of this judgement - that it would be an improvement, for their health and their welfare, their possibilities of self-fulfilment and happiness , and one that they could themselves come to recognize and fight for - we may hold that we are entitled to speak of objective interests.(Geras 1987: 51).

Consider the language at work. 'We' observe 'it', 'believe' this or that about 'it', 'we' make 'judgements' about what 'we' take to be in 'their health and their welfare, their possibilities of self-fulfilment and happiness', in two words, their 'objective interests'. The referent of 'we' remains unexplicated: it could be the one who writes, Geras, but, in context, it seems more likely that is a collective we, meaning 'we who are merry to be Marxists', much as others might say, speaking individually but in the sense of a shared collectivity, that 'we' are 'glad to be gay'. It is evident, however, that while one might say that one was part of a collective 'we' whose identity was 'out', whose 'queerness' was a collective self-attribution, so that subject and object intrinsically mediate, this mediation is missing from Geras' 'we'. Instead, 'we' exists in an external tutelary and exhoratory relationship to 'it', a 'working class' that requires more clarity, persuasion, the benefit of our judgement. Presumed is that 'we' know what is good for 'it', even where 'it' does not know. 'We' can 'persuade' them. Indeed, it is our moral duty to do so. One might say that our moral duty drives obligations of power. We have to get others to do what they would not otherwise have done. In this case, what they would not otherwise have done is to accept our view of their world. Neither do Laclau and Mouffe (1985). In fact, they resist it strongly (Laclau and Mouffe 1987).

According to Foucault (1977), resistance merely serves to demonstrate the necessity of that discipline that provokes it. It becomes a target against which discipline may justify its necessity because of its lack of omnipotence. Disciplinary practices, constituting boundaries between what is and what is not, what can be and what can not, what should be and what should not, become strategic when they are effective constitutions of powers. As a form of knowledge they work through their own ontogenesis. Because they are knowledge constituted not just in texts but in definite institutional and organisational practices, they are 'discursive practices': knowledge reproduced through practices made possible by the framing assumptions of that knowledge. Marxism defines itself against such practice that serves to obscure, to mask, its own strategic accomplishment. This is the thrust of Geras' remark cited above.

Against all currents of Marxism, Foucault (1977) argued that disciplinary practices of power do not necessarily register an intentional effect of will, least of all of that traditional central condensation of power, the state.

> There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can run different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy (Foucault 1984: 101-102).

One makes a mistake to assume fixed interests on the one hand, and definite discourse representing them, on the other. Mouthing what must in time, irrespective of their content, become political platitude, does not secure the certainty of interests. 'Discourses have no fixed referent in particular values or systems of morality' (Weedon 1987: 123)

Dissolve fixed relationships between discourse, practice and interests and power is not a 'single, all-encompassing strategy' (Foucault 1984: 103). Power will be a more or less stable network of alliances extended over a shifting terrain of practice and discursively constituted interests. Points of resistance will open up at many points in the network (Foucault 1984: 95) whose effect will be to fracture alliances, constitute regroupings and re-posit strategies (Foucault 1984: 96). In such formulations power is to be seen almost wholly in strategic terms. Consequently, power has a shifting, inherently unstable expression in networks and alliances. Rather than a monolithic view of power such a focus will draw on Machiavelli's strategic concerns and Gramsci's notion of a 'war of manoeuvre'. The talisman of

the state as the sovereign power, its possible seizure, and the assumption that this is the single, or even central lever for the manipulation of power in society at large and accompanying notion of power as both centralised and mechanistic need abandoning, according to this new view.

Moralistic notions presume to measure what is good and false by reference to some absolute, external and abstracted standard of appropriate practice. Foucault refuses the choice of moral absolutism. He does not presume to tell us what really is or should be. This does not mean that he embraces moral relativism: instead, his project is a thorough-going 'constitutive' one. Foucault seeks to show relations of 'agency' and 'structure' constituted discursively, to show how the denial of agency to some, it's offering to others, how structures determine some things and not others. The focus is upon the constitution of certain forms of representation rather than the 'truth' or 'falsity' of the representations themselves. In this respect Laclau and Mouffe (1985) are thoroughgoingly Foucauldian. By Geras' reckoning they are inverts, authors of an 'interpretative travesty', an 'inversion of values'.

The travesty leads to a logic of 'hegemonic articulation'. This concept addresses 'hegemony', the central tool characteristic of Western Marxism. For Laclau and Mouffe, notions of ideology as a distinct level of the social totality or as false consciousness are unacceptable if they depend on an essentialist conception of society and social agency. The position that ideology is a level of a social totality, the superstructure masking the real nature of the base, is one that requires a conception of society as an 'intelligible totality', in effect a classical Marxist base-superstructure model. Here the totality operates as an underlying principle of intelligibility. Empirical variations in the surface of society signify an underlying social order. Against this version Laclau and Mouffe insist on the 'excess of meaning' that surrounds any attempted creation of a social system. In place of society as a fixed system of positions they argue for the identity of the social in terms of the infinite play of differences that discourse constitutes.

The social as an infinite play of differences is subject to hegemonic principles in which the discursive elements forever articulate in determinate, albeit unstable and transitory ways. Since one cannot establish these forms of determination in an essentialist *a priori* fashion, the base-superstructure division and the conception of ideology as a necessary level

in the totality both fail. The conception of ideology as false consciousness rests on a similar essentialism. It is only tenable if the actor has a fixed and true identity that he/she is capable of recognising, generally, because of his/her 'true interests'. One needs to abandon such a conception of social agency. Class does not give one an identity, where that concept applies as an external analyst's category, one unrecognized by the membership categories that members of specific social settings actually use, recognize and engage in. Identity is nothing but the unstable articulation of constantly changing membership categories All social agents are thus 'decentered'. Because this is so, there is no way in which they can misrecognize themselves. Consequently, the theoretical ground that made sense of concepts of 'false consciousness' or hegemony masking objective interests disappears. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) term this theoretical move the break with essentialism.

The break with essentialism means retaining a notion of ideology only be 'inverting' its traditional content. Ideology would not consist of the misrecognition of a fixed positive essence but rather the opposite: the refusal to recognise the always unstable articulated character of a social form: 'The ideological would consist of those discursive forms through which a society tries to institute itself as such on the basis of closure, of the fixation of meaning, of the non-recognition of the infinite play of differences', as Laclau (1983: 24) put it. On this basis of identifying the ideological with the fixity of meaning, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) were subsequently to dismiss almost the entire Marxist tradition as ideologically essentialist. What is noteworthy are the conclusions reached by Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 112): politics only ever partially fixes the forms of articulation of meanings. It is this that constitutes hegemony. Meaning never finally fixes, according to post-structuralist emphases on the relational quality of meaning. It is because meaning is relational that it never wholly stabilises, according to this analysis. In consequence, the impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixings - otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be a meaning.

While rejecting Geras' (1987; 1988) critique as principally a defence of the old faith, one may acknowledge the advance made by Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) revisionist critique, but only to a point. In common with post-structuralism it produces a contingent politics of articulation in opposition to the determinate certainties of classical Marxism. Politics become

theoretically problematic. It is not foreseeable in terms of a master-narrative of classes, for example, but is subject to local construction and determination in settings where the class-narrative may find purchase. Or, it may not. Whether this is the case will depend upon local politics and these are contingent upon no necessity other than those imposed in specific arena, by specific agencies, involved in specific struggles, strategies and tactics; always with specific and contingent effects. The nature of identity is contingent upon discursive practices. Agents will struggle over phenomena constituted as arguable according to the conditions of particular discursive processes and they will formulate their interests accordingly. Such interests have no existence outside the conditions of particular discursive practices and struggles, contrary to what a Marxian structuralist definition would seem to imply. In this view class struggle is prioritised; other struggles might exist, but unlike class they are merely contingent. This view not only over-determines class but also under-conceptualizes other sources of struggle as well as excluding other modes of interest representation.

Hindess (1982; also see 1986) has argued that unless interests figure as actors' reasons for acting, where that action has consequences, the concept of interests is sociologically unsustainable. In other words, interests feature as elements of discursive availability. These stand in relations of articulation with those consequences held to discursively flow from them. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 113) put it, this 'practice of articulation ... consists in the construction of nodal points that partially fix meaning'. Such a partial fix can never be immutable in the face of the indexicality of all expression, as Garfinkel (1967) has established: all meaning ultimately refers to the context of its interpretation, including, especially, the forms of knowledge and disciplinary practice through which agencies resolve particular instances of the indexicality of expression and discourse. Do not reduce interpretations to the interests one presumes the agent to have. Interests are elements that are discursively available. Subjects do not necessarily fix reasons for action: there may be other discursively available reasons for action than those that a given subject articulates in a discourse. Mechanisms for ensuring their applicability may or may not be present. Voluntarist subjects may or may not embrace them. For instance, in what were the state socialiost societies the rush to embrace the categories of Marxism has not been great, the preference instead seeming to be for categories of nationalism as much as consumerism, capitalism, the market.

If reasons for action are situationally available as discursive vocabularies for accounting-for-action, a discussion of interests as reasons for action can focus on the structurally legitimate and socially available discursive frameworks in particular situations. These will be an effect of past struggles in which the 'interests' of certain forms of interest representation have been constituted in the constraints and pressures on discursive availability. Reasons for action may themselves represent interests. Such reasons are thus effectively already the representation of some other interests, as well as also being those of that agency that articulates them.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) do not regard power as having a necessary centre. However, the object of their antagonism is almost wholly the Marxist tradition, to which they themselves claim to belong. It is in this tradition, in both its theory and its political practice, that they see the major obstacle to the socialist pluralism that they espouse. For them socialism must be about power, not so much winning it or seizing it, but about deploying it in ways that extend the range of popular freedoms rather than restricting these in the name of an insuperable orthodoxy. In their view the central traditions of Marxist analysis have become such an orthodoxy, acting as barriers to the recognition of sources of power and oppression not easily catechised in the context of the state, capital and ideology as the political, economic and ideological expression of a base/superstructure model. Consequently, they oppose the whole discourse of 'real interests'. They condemn almost the whole of Marxism for the 'essentialism' of its analyses - the way it smuggles in ungrounded prime movers to explain phenomena, entities such as the class structure, the state, and so on. A move reminiscent of the Frankfurt school of critical theory follows, albeit expressed through elements of post-structuralism. Power exists neither in specific individuals (as in Lukes) nor in concrete practices (as in Foucault) but in the way in which agents and practices articulate in a particular fixed ensemble of representations. There is only representation, no fixed, real, hidden or excluded term or dimension. To the extent that meanings become fixed or reified on certain forms, and these then articulate particular practices, agents and relations, then this fixity is power. Power is the apparent order of taken for granted categories of existence fixed and represented in a myriad discursive forms and practices. Power is neither ethical nor micro political: above all it is textual, semiotic, inherent in the very possibility of textuality, meaning and signification in the social world.

The central feature of power consists in this fixing of the terrain for its own expression.

Institutionalizing discourse analysis: the politics of 'nodal points' and 'modes of rationality'

The key aspect of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) work is the notion of 'nodal points' of discourse. What this seeks to avoid is an analytical terminus that entraps subjects within, and by, the sovereign power of ideology and hegemony, the ultimate prohibition that forbids the subject's recognition of the awesome power that subordinates them, which leads them to feel free as it entraps them. Yet, some nodal points are capable of being fixed in remarkably stable ways when viewed historically. It ought to be possible to explain how such an essential nodality as the state's construction of rationalised law became fixed, and this, I think, is where a revised notion of power may be useful (see Clegg 1989 for an elaboration of this point). What this revised notion will focus on is precisely the fixing of certain necessities of discourse, traffic and exchange as power. Power will thus reside in the practices that secure fixity as much as in the outcomes of struggles between combatants within this fixity.

The rejection of any notion of there being transcendent positions constituted outside discursive practices dissolves the notion of fixed or objective interests. Yet, within the floating signifiers liberated, some representations will achieve a power far greater than others, a power that is neither an effect of a human subject and its volition nor of a structure whose will works behind the backs of such subjects. It is the representations themselves, the fundamental discursively formed ways of constituting relations, which have a historically specific character, that are the object of analysis. Certain forms of 'strategic' contingency do in fact fix and institutionalise nodal points through which the institutionally defined activities have to flow. Mouzelis (1988) requires a theory of 'institutionalism' as his contribution to the debate, when he writes

> *there is absolutely no reason why one should link discursive constructions with fragility and precariousness* - labelling any reference to institutional durability as essentialist. For the core institutions of a social formation often display such a resilience and continuity that their overall, extremely slow transformation can be seen only in the very *longue durée*, needing to be assessed in terms of centuries rather than years or shorter timespans.
>
> Consider, for instance, the strict separation of the ruler's or the civil servant's position from his/her private fortune. This institutional separation of the 'private' from the 'public' within the western European state took centuries to be firmly consolidated and

> today seems pretty well irreversible. To all intents and purposes, therefore, this structural feature, together with others of equal durability and resilience (the institutions of private property, of markets, of money, the institutional separation between management and ownership in modern corporations, etc.), constitute a core which enters the subjects' social milieu not as something to be negotiated or radically transformed, but as an incontrovertible given, as a relatively unshakeable, durable, institutional terrain. This terrain both limits and makes possible specific articulatory practices, whose intended or unintended consequences may seriously affect more malleable and fragile institutional arrangements. The fact that laymen and even social scientists tend sometimes to reify a social formation's durable institutional orders (i.e. tend to forget that these are discursively constructed and reproduced) does not make them less durable; on the contrary, the 'natural attitude;' to them further enhances their institutional resilience (Mouzelis 1988: 113-14).

In the same vein Bocock (1986: 108-109) observes the materiality of not only money in the economy but also of law in the state. Each of these stabilise, constitute and connect a disparate set of subjects produced through the practices of civil society, into meaningfully fixed and stable totalities, of employers and employees, the lawful and the lawless, law enforcers and law breakers and so on. Moreover, each of these practices is not merely discursive but has a high degree of materiality to them, constituted in offices, factories, shops, courts, prisons, and so on. On these points both Habermas and Parsons would agree: each would regard the law and money as 'circulatory media'.

Habermas (1984) is of particular interest in his view of the law. Habermas regards the law as the rationalised development of substantive culture and ethics, rather than as a functional necessity of the state. From the Middle Ages onwards its rationalisation is such that it develops an ever greater relative autonomy vis a vis sovereign will and power. It becomes, in Parsons terms, ever more universalistic and decreasingly particularistic in its principles, as elements of tradition, religious belief and custom diminish by the conscious reflections of juridical authorities, constituting what Foucault (1977) discusses as the new regulatory power of judgement. The push towards universalism and internal consistency is precisely what gives law its 'fixity' as an articulatory practice.

The analysis of law focuses on strategies of discursive power. To be strategic is to practice a specific form of power/knowledge, one that is distinctive in gaining an ascendant position in the representation of normal subjectivity. The examples of this, other than law, are legion. One can think of forms of surveillance, for instance, which constitute the normal concerning a penology or a medical knowledge, such as psychiatry, from whose 'gaze'

and ruling one subsequently cannot escape. It does not matter whether one is a prison or medical officer, or one criminally or medically confined. Categories of knowledge organise all universes of meaning, incorporating more widespread practices of normalisation, such as good management in the workplace, the household, the state and so on. The work of Michael Pusey (1991) on the normalisation of economic rationality as good management of the state in Australia would be a case in point.

From the argument thus far I draw the following implication. The balance of the argument lies with Laclau and Mouffe (1985; 1988). Mouzelis (1988) points to an important institutional lacuna in the theory that they propose: institutional theory. For some years, (since my first book, *Power, Rule and Domination*, in fact), I have been employing a key term for such an institutional theory. This is the notion of *modes of rationality*. Simply put, utterances and discourse are never immaculate. They always have a public, social dimension. Language games arer always implicated. This is what it means to talk of their institutionalization. If we are able to transcribe and identify the disciplining boundaries within which subjects make sense of themselves and their projects, as well as the means for their realization, that is, if we are able to identify what it is, analytically, that makes possible such actions as they engage in, (what Mouzelis [1988: 121] refers to as the 'forces' and 'relations' of domination), then we have the conceptual requirements for studying the politics of substantive settings. Foucault's (1977) notion of disciplinary power will be a key resource. In some substantive settings, such as the politics of Marxist theory, we may well find institutionalized categories constructed and deployed, such as 'objective interests', but now we can recognize them for what they are. Not literal descriptions of actually existing states of affairs so much as strategies of disciplinary power for assembling such states of affairs. The relative success or failure of these strategies may be judged as such only through practice, as Marxists have long recognized. On this basis, the scorecard is not good.

Power, democracy and the dissolution of political boundaries

There are no 'real' interests, unseen by subjects but functioning as a holy grail for analysis. No theoretician and no theory, no politician and no party, can do other than to create a representation that this is the case. Historically, there are no recorded examples of any such representations having been secured by any democratic party or politics. There is a great deal of discussion of why this is the case, of why 'radical' representations

failed to develop in mundane practices. Today much of this debate, about the interests of the state and the realisation of the interests of the working class or their suppression by the ruling class has some of the qualities of a myth. The myth had a historical locus that, although clearly modernist, was not originally Marxist. It was present at the dawn of modern Anglo-Saxon concepts of power and politics as Hobbes bequeathed them. Hobbes's notion of the sovereign state may have had some purchase in the moral projects of his day, although, even then, it was more prescriptive in its description. In its subsequent working out in the various imaginations of the left, the prescriptive content invariably subordinates the empirical.

Claims to know the real interests of any group, other than through whatever techniques of representation one uses to assert them, can not survive the re-conceptualization of power. One or other of two versions of a new kind of politics characterize this juncture: the first call is for a greater transparency, for a politics attuned to 'real' bases of moral life such as gender and the ecology. Such reflexes that seek to find some level of reality that evades the social are not worth detaining us here: it should be clear that these reflexes are no less problematic than other searches for the baseline for the holy grail of politically right representation.

The other call, less oriented to the realisation and revelation of an a priori project, seeks to create a program in which the pluraiity of possible identities might flourish. The administrative rationalities of the state, its steering and central calculation, perhaps to the regret of an old-school socialism, are unlikely to achieve such a program. On the contrary, it is far more likely to flourish in a situation where the market is the central institution, offering those identities already formed discursively an opportunity to recognise themselves in those things that markets can provide, a degree of choice and consumer sovereignty. This is not an endorsement of the 'market' and its rhetoric on the part of the author of this paper. It would be a considerable irony if this was the case. The market, as a definite social mechanism, is itself a nodal point whose necessity has to be subject to continual innovation, production and reproduction. The crucial opposition of socialist strategy in the past pitted the state against the market. Today, both sets of essentialism require replacement. The state, as the material condensation of multifarious local politics and transcendent rationalities registered as nodal points necessary to political truck and trade, may facilitate the marketisation of areas of

social life, where the normal forms of political expression in sophisticated electoral systems restrict, enable and mediate democratic desires. To repeat, however: if the 'state' is a term whose meaning is now not what it was, this is not occasion to celebrate the triumph of the market. It is not a matter of replacing the sovereign state with the sovereign consumer. Both are fictions of different kinds of politics, different kinds of knowledge. The market is not a sphere of pure freedom, of pure consumer sovereignty. In any moderately complex market such as that in which we dwell of necessity as highly differentiated subjects, consumers and citizens, the market produces not sovereign freedoms but mechanical dependencies as Durkheim (1964) recognised almost at the outset. Free to choose? Not really. Free to pay for this or that product, advice or service, if we have the resources to do so. Free to be constructed in the image of whatever contingently institutionalized constructs exist.

Truth is a representation. This is so as much for politics as for science, for the delights of the market as for the pleasures of the text, in the nooks and crannies of power as in the citadels of the state. Indeed, there is little difference in this regard. Power legislates on the 'truth' of interpretation, not because there is any one power that stands in some determinate and definite relationship to the reality of things. Power is not the kind of thing that one can possess and move in this way: it is itself utterly implicated in its many forms of local practice and there is no reason to think that these are imbricated in any necessary way with each other. Similarly, in politics there is unlikely to be any one correct route or party-line for all issues, because there are no real interests underlying these issues, lacing them together into one narrative for our lifetimes, with clear and unshifting advocates of the good, the bad and the ugly.

No one party would seem feasible whose power one can possess and move in the achievement of any complex set of desiderata. To the extent that the desiderata are not complex, parties may be able to present themselves as advocates of more or less unequivocal and neglected 'goods': the most salient being in ascending order of abstraction and consequent inverse simplification in the West now, the politics of one earth, one body, one nation, one institution, corresponding to the interests of the ecology, to the interests of women, to the interests of communitarian aspirations to statehood inscribed on the basis of whatever markers of difference - be they cultural, linguistic or ethnic - and the subordination of all interests to those

that find expression through the market. It should be clear that reduction of politics to single-issue moralities does not present a very flexible basis for actual conduct, with all of its specific complexities, fudges, and ambiguity, however appealing is as a ground for the pronouncement of moral judgements. Moreover, note an absence from this list. Today there is no party that would seem to want to take on the role of defending the state, nor does it seem likely that there will be one. Certainly, bits and pieces of the state may have more or less support, such as the support for socialised health care in Britain (Papadakis and Taylor-Gooby 1987), but this does not translate into support for the state per se. The abstraction does not mean anything positive for most citizens.

Some commentators conclude from this a requirement for a more encompassing theory of citizenship to reflect postmodern times (Barbalet 1988; Roche 1992). The globalization of capitalist economics and culture (Robertson 1992) transform the nature of citizenship in relation to sovereignty and the nation-state (Mann 1987; Rose and Miller 1992). The socialist project, in its various Marxist forms, was one that made sense only within a restricted conception of the relation between the state and the economy. States were sovereign; economies were not. Global institutions have transformed that relation: while it is evident that some states retain more sovereign powers than others, and the empirical delineation of these is an important task for analysis (Dow 1993), the basic calibration that framed the earlier assumptions has shifted. National economic space is no longer the sole project of sovereign national subjects.

One argument suggests that democracy functions better the more it represents and the less it excludes categories of interests. Today the focus is no longer just on exclusion from or participation in the formal representations of politics. De jure, these are universalistic in societies like Australia and the United States, even where the de facto realization of rights universally attributed flaws representation, as various critique; from feminism (Pateman 1989; Turner 1986); of the welfare state (Andrews 1991), and about multicultural diversity and participation, suggest.. Democracy is no longer something that can be made more inclusive: the traditional need for recognition of the excluded from the political process makes little sense when what is being called for is not an incorporation into the one political life-world, but a recognition of the plurality and authenticity of many life-

worlds (see Offe 1983 on this point). Citizenship, framed by rights, granted by the state, evolutionary in character and framed in terms of universal membership categories, is not what those who choose the politics of the life-world seek. One might almost say that, like many things, as the Duke once wrote, democracy 'ain't what it used to be'.

There are no privileged identities around which interest formation occurs. Interests will form where they do only where there are people who, through whatever agencies of representation, constitute themselves as a communal milieu, one that, moreover, has to make its own capacities for action. Perhaps that really is why the best examples of such groups are those ruling classes, schooled for the tasks of rule, whom researchers like Domhoff (1978) delineate in all their cultural capital, sites and organisation. The ruling class frequently is able to rule: it has a common cultural capital, expensively reproduced, and it has complex organisational capacities that frequently allow it to outflank opposition that is less coherent and less well organised.

In the future there may be many possible communitarian bases for identity formation and common interest recognition, but in the absence of organisational capacities, they are not likely to be of significant impact. That is why socialism was important: it seemed to be the organisational capacity upon which, in concertation with, in alliance with or in place of the old unity of the 'working class'; (the degree of unity of which was frequently less than those schooled for rule), new interests and identities could be projected. However, that projection broke the image of the original illusion and introduced a bewildering degree of identities and uncertainty in place of the old identity, the old certainty, of a social realism that cast only one role of any dramatic potential.

The organisational capacities of the old social democraticparties based on this view of political democracy have responded to new projections much as one might expect: the medium has now become the message. It really doesn't matter much anymore what the message is, as long the marketing is distinctive and reproduces the organisational capacities. Electoral success depends now on pin-point accuracy in niche-marketing local concerns and issues to local communities and groups in the key marginal seats. With this degree of differentiation and sophistication in the main game, winning elections, it would be naive to expect the re-emergence of any grand identity

or set of interests for political recognition. Naive, because politically suicidal. The role of mass parties is to organise to win. Simple identities and key slogans of earlier mass politics, with relatively limited and highly centralised forms of political address, such as mass meetings, pamphlets, newspaper, decline. Today, highly flexible and specialist forms of political marketing, involving local polling, mail-outs, and profiles that micro-computers make available, can interpellate a multiplicity of identities. While the medium may be the message, the message fragments in representation. This form of receptivity to local concerns and issues, their articulation and canalisation, is today's communitarian democracy within mass politics.

Politics, as is its wont, has already outstripped theoretical practice. It took some centuries for the Hobbesian basis of contemporary views of the state to become exhausted. There are likely to be many more years in which to enjoy radical political theories of the state addressed to interest groups which in practice form no coherent constituency of interest-representation.

In practice, there is no a priori reason why policies should be consistent: after all they represent nothing other than local practical accomplishments and accommodation of politics to the specifities of power that succeed in institutionalization[4].

Literally, there are no enchanted alternatives to the postmodern condition of possibilities that require repeated contest to secure. The possible bases of re-enchantment of the political project seem unlikely to succeed: the proletariat, women, even the ecology, are doubtful unities to serve as a moral basis for postmodernity, as writers like judith Butler (1990) recognize[5].

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4 In this respect, one might anticipate that fin-de-sieçle socialism will be as morally bankrupt as it is politically astute. Indeed, its moral bankruptcy may well be one of its great strengths, rather as English Conservatism was before Mrs. Thatcher got her hands on it.

5 Butler's (1990) g'enealogy of gender ontology' is an intriguing counterpoint to Garfinkel's (1967) account of Agnes. Indeed, the suggestion by Butler (1990: 33) that 'A political genealogy of gender ontologies, if it is successful, wuill deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constituebnt acts and locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames that police the social appearabnce of gender' is precisely what one might take Garfinkel's (1967) account of Agnes to achieve.

It is doubtful that there are any such bases. There are politics rooted in past practices, sedimented structures and materialised meanings, which in the memorable modernist rallying cry, 'weigh like a nightmare on the brain of the living'. Yet, the living can not easily shrug them off: they frame our postmodern condition even as we cease to believe in them. Nihilism, masked by local enthusiasms artfully organised, and contested claims to citizenship rights, would seem the appropriate fate of our times.

Conclusion

To restore the old power, the old theory, the old slogans, the old battalions, the old songs, is a task fit only for an ironicist. The essential verities of binary politics premised on a single us and them, whose balance of power transforms only with the displacement of the one by the other from the sphere of control, is a modern anachronism. There is no one sphere of control; no one central, single obligatory passage point, no one set of 'commanding heights' from which to reign. This is not to say, either, that all is free-floating signification. What fixity occurs is an effect of power and as such, neither its necessary core nor its cause.

Politics in general are power politics and have to be so if they are to survive in whatever contingent form. Of course, under these conditions there is neither necessity to nor guarantees of 'socialism'. It has as much historical necessity as those other signs and slogans that litter the past political wealth of nations. In this sense Geras' (1987; 1988) sentiments are already an anachronism while Laclau and Mouffe's (1985; 1988) are fast on the way to being so. The former seeks to protect and preserve the old map of the boundaries while the latter re-draw it too much in some respects - in de-emphasizing the institutional facet of politics - and simultaneously remain too committed to some sentimental landmarks from the old boundaries. Here, one thinks of the concluding pages to 'Post Marxism without apologies' (Laclau and Mouffe 1988: 103), particularly the nostalgia for 1968 and the equation of 'anti-capitalism' with 'an internal moment of democratic revolution'. By this they mean that in the past socialism has been an integral component of the struggle to extend democratic and citizenship rights. While this is undoubtedly correct, it is not consistent to suggest that for the future anti-capitalist struggle is necessarily radical or progressive. To do so is to deny the seductive powers of signification that the institutions of capitalism present, empirically, to citizens today. Also, it is to reify the achievements of the past and project them forward into a

space where the same disciplining boundaries that produced those achievements then have no guarantees for the future now.

The final irony of the dissolution of political boundaries attendant on the disciplinary decline of the concept of hegemony is not so much that the concept no longer has any content, Laclau and Mouffe's achievement, but that the totalizing principle, capitalism, now seems to admit of no repressed other. The politics of pluralism demand co-presence, as Dahl (1958) long ago recognized. While in the past the elisions, the absences, from this co-presence suggested a moment of hegemony, a moment of repression, after Foucault, after Laclau and Mouffe, it becomes extremely difficult to maintain such a view. The 'radical view', by definition, requires a structure and a substructure, so that there is something, literally, beneath the surface. Finally, it is this boundary, and the disciplines of Western Marxism that sustained it, that Laclau and Mouffe's argument seeks to dissolve. On this much at least, Geras is 'correct'. After the demise of Hobbesian geometry, after the demise of Western Marxism, what else remains but the self-destruction of those disciplining boundaries that held sway for so long? [6]

[6] The allusions are twofold. First, to Lorca's prefaratory line in his poem 'Suicide', (from *Canciones* [1921-24], see pp. 29-30 of Lorca (1960). Second, to that geometry with which Hobbes (1960) configured the mechanics of power into what became a metaphorical universe, one whose limits this paper sought to illuminate. The debate between Geras and Laclau and Mouffe sounded the theoretical deatgh-knell: later the Wall came down. Later still, fatalities spread to the political sphere, most notably in Italy, where, in the 1994 general electiπons the disciplining boundaries that had sustained and nourished Western Marxism in its core project imploded.

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